

- What did you learn about the people or places you visited that you would not have otherwise learned?

Upon traveling to Germany, I learned how irreplaceable primary sources are in comparison to secondary sources. Working with archival materials showed me that primary sources have a depth of perspective unmatched by secondary literature alone. I made a certain comparison for myself: secondary sources feel like a prepared product. Everything is already processed, interpreted, and presented for you. Archival research, by contrast, provides access to raw materials: you must look for your own interpretation, context, and meaning from scratch. This experience made me understand how much intellectual responsibility primary research requires. Also, this trip was a meaningful immersion in the German language in a way that would have been impossible by any other means. German is one of the languages I aspire to reach fluency in, and working in archives required comprehension of administrative language. That was a situation I had always wished to experience, and it proved to be deeply rewarding.

- If you could undertake this travel and research again, would you do anything different?

As someone who believes in imperfection as a teacher, afterthought often leads to scenarios of what “should have been done better,” without acknowledging the limited information and choices available at the time. However, hypothetically speaking, I would have paid closer attention to certain practical nuances (transportation options, etc.) That said, experiences like this also taught me that no amount of preparation can eliminate unexpected changes in plans (such as a snowstorm on the day of my trip from Berlin to Koblenz that impacted train routes). Even the most carefully planned research trip will involve situations that cannot be anticipated. In that sense, the only thing I would change is my mindset before the trip.

I spent time overthinking unfamiliar environments and administrative procedures in another language, but everything ultimately went smoothly. I now consider openness, flexibility, and adaptability essential qualities for successful research.

- How have you grown, as an individual, as a result of this travel and research experience?

This research experience has been truly life-changing. Traveling alone to another country with a specific research purpose in a different language was empowering. Communicating with native speakers in professional contexts required confidence and problem-solving skills that I had not fully developed before this trip. Learning and using another language in such an immersive context placed me on the path of self-discovery, and that did not disappoint: I discovered someone who strives for change and leadership. Working in archives in a foreign language required me to adapt quickly to unfamiliar environments. I realized that these situations felt surprisingly natural to me, and this reinforced my sense of independence and strong preparation skills. After the trip, I can confidently say that Germany holds a special place in my heart. The vibrancy of the streets, the rhythm of daily life, and the overall atmosphere left a strong association with personal growth. This experience strengthened my academic skills and enhanced my sense of confidence, curiosity, and openness toward the world.